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UNITED STATES SOCCER FEDERATION

Instructions for Referees and Resolutions Affecting Team Coaches and Players

Regional and National Cup Competitions and Tournaments

**Julie Ilacqua
Managing Director of Federation Services**

**Alfred Kleinaitis
Manager of Referee Development and Education**

The decisions and instructions to referees appointed to Regional and National Cup Competitions and Tournaments contained herein conform to the Laws of the Game, the decisions of the International F.A. Board, and guidance from USSF through its Advice to Referees, Guide to Procedures, and various official memoranda. This document is therefore regarded as authoritative and may be quoted as such. For further details on any of these points, consult the sources listed above.

Decisions made during play depend entirely on the opinion of the referee, who makes a decision at the time of the incident. Coaches are requested to inform their players of the points specified below and to ensure that every game is played sportingly.

1. Serious Foul Play and Violent Conduct

Soccer is a tough, combative sport. The contest to gain possession of the ball should nonetheless be fair and sporting. Any actions meeting these criteria, even when vigorous, must be allowed by the referee.

Serious Foul Play and Violent Conduct are, however, strictly forbidden and the referee must react to them by stringently applying the Laws of the Game.

These two offenses can be defined as follows:

- (a) It is serious foul play when a player uses excessive force, formerly defined as "disproportionate and unnecessary strength," when challenging for the ball on the field against an opponent. There can be no serious foul play against a teammate, the referee, an assistant referee, a spectator, etc.
- (b) It is violent conduct when a player is guilty of aggression (excessive force or deliberate violence) towards an opponent when they are not competing for the ball. It is also violent conduct if the excessive force is used when the ball is not in play or if it is directed at anyone other than an opponent (e. g., teammate, referee, assistant referee, coach, spectator, etc.). If the violent conduct is committed against an opponent on the field during play, the restart is a direct free kick for the opposing team where the foul occurred (or a penalty kick if it was committed by a player inside the player's team's penalty area). If the violent conduct is by a player during play against anyone on the field other than an opponent, the restart is an indirect free kick where the misconduct occurred. If the violent conduct is committed during a stoppage of play, the restart is not changed. A dropped ball where the ball was when play is stopped is the correct restart if the violent conduct is committed during play either off the field or by a substitute.

2. Tackling

A tackle as such is not an infringement of the Laws of the Game. It becomes an infringement only if the tackler plays carelessly, recklessly, or with excessive force, or places the opponent in danger.

- (a) A sliding tackle from the front or side, made with one or both legs, is permissible if, in the opinion of the referee, it is not dangerous. If, however, the player making the tackle trips the opponent before, during, or after making contact with the ball, the referee shall award a direct free kick to the opposing team. The referee must judge whether an illegal trip occurred or whether the opponent fell over the leg of the player making a legal tackle.
- (b) Tackling with the foot lifted from the ground may be dangerous, whether contact is made with the ball or not. Lifting of the foot should be penalized if the referee considers the player is endangering an opponent by so doing. If the player deliberately plays over the ball and makes contact with the opponent's leg, this is serious foul play and must be sanctioned with a send-off (red card) and a direct free kick (or a penalty kick, if appropriate).
- (c) Tackling with two feet together, studs up, if uncontrolled and from a distance, could be judged as at least dangerous to the opponent and possibly reckless as well. If controlled and from a short distance, there may be no danger.
- (d) A tackle, regardless of direction, which endangers the safety of an opponent must be sanctioned as serious foul play. The player must be sent from the field (red card) and play restarted with a direct free kick (or a penalty kick if committed by a player inside the player's team's own penalty area).

3. Charging from behind

Charging from behind is permissible only if the opponent is intentionally impeding (shielding the ball). The charge, however, must be made fairly and under no circumstances to the back (spinal area).

4. Offenses against goalkeepers

It is an offense if a player:

- (a) jumps at a goalkeeper under the pretext of heading the ball;
- (b) dodges about in front of a goalkeeper in order to interfere with or prevent the goalkeeper from releasing the ball;
- (c) who is standing in front of a goalkeeper when a corner kick is being taken, takes advantage of the position to impede the goalkeeper before the kick is taken and before the ball is in play;
- (d) makes any play for the ball while the goalkeeper is still controlling it with the hands.

5. Impeding the progress of an opponent

A player who has the ball under control within playing distance (i.e., the distance at which the player is covering the ball for tactical reasons in order to avoid its being played by an opponent, without using the arms) is not guilty of impeding the progress of the opponent.

Any player who intentionally impedes the progress of an opponent by crossing directly in front of or running between the opponent and the ball or intervening so as to form an obstacle with the aim of delaying the opponent's advance, must be sanctioned with an indirect free kick in favor of the opposing team.

However, any player who intentionally impedes the progress of an opponent by physical contact, whether using the hand, arm, leg, or any other part of the body, shall be penalized by the award of a direct free kick to the opposing team, or by a penalty kick, if the offense was committed within the player's team's penalty area.

6. Scissors or bicycle kick

Such a kick is permissible, provided that in the opinion of the referee it is not dangerous to an opponent.

7. Jumping at an opponent

A player who jumps at an opponent under the pretext of heading the ball shall be penalized by the award of a direct free kick to the opposing team.

8. Prohibited use of body

A player who holds off an opponent using the hand, arm, leg, or body (except through a legal charge) is guilty of an infringement of Law 12 and shall be punished by the award of a direct free kick to the opposing team. Holding or hindering when the ball is out of play in order to prevent the opponent from running into position is misconduct and shall be penalized by a caution for unsporting behavior.

9. Caution for handling the ball or holding an opponent

A caution for unsporting behavior is appropriate if a player:

- (a) holds an opponent to interfere with attacking play (e.g., prevents the opponent from getting to the ball or pulls an opponent away from possession of the ball),
- (b) handles the ball to interfere with attacking play, or
- (c) handles the ball in an attempt to score a goal.

(Note: if handling the ball or holding the opponent prevents a goal or interferes with a goalscoring opportunity, the offender must be shown the red card and sent off the field.)

10. Free kicks

- (a) The referee shall indicate the award of an indirect free kick by raising an arm over the head. The referee shall keep the arm in that position from the moment the kick is taken until the ball has been next touched or played by another player or goes out of play.
- (b) Any player who, for any reason, deliberately delays a free kick being taken by the opposing team may be cautioned (yellow card) at the referee's discretion.
- (c) Any player who prematurely (before the ball is in play) rushes forward from the defensive wall, formed at least 10 yards (9.15 m) from the ball, before the ball has been kicked, may be cautioned (yellow card) at the referee's discretion.
- (d) While the Law states that all opposing players should retire to a distance of at least 10 yards (9.15 m) from the ball, the referee has discretionary power to disregard this requirement to enable a free kick to be taken quickly.

11. Use of advantage

If the referee applies the advantage and the advantage which was anticipated does not develop after a short time, i.e., 2-3 seconds, and the ball remains in play, the referee should immediately stop the game and penalize the original offense.

12. Denying a goal or an obvious goalscoring opportunity

- (a) If, in the opinion of the referee, a player who is moving towards the opponent's goal, with an obvious opportunity to score a goal, is denied that goalscoring opportunity by an offense punishable by a free kick or penalty kick, the offending player shall be shown the red card and sent off the field of play.
- (b) If, in the opinion of the referee, a player, other than the goalkeeper within the goalkeeper's own penalty area, deliberately handles the ball to prevent it from entering the goal and thus denies the opposing side a goal or an obvious goalscoring opportunity, the player shall be shown the red card and sent off the field of play. There need not be an opponent nearby with an opportunity to play the ball.

13. Penalty kick

- (a) Positioning of ball and players during a penalty kick
During a penalty kick, the goalkeeper shall stand on the goal line. Apart from the goalkeeper and the player taking the kick, all the players shall take up a position on the field of play behind the penalty mark and outside the penalty area at least 10 yards (9.15 m) from the penalty mark and stay there until the ball is in play (kicked and moved forward).
- (b) Penalty kick at the end of a half or at the end of the match
If play is prolonged before half-time or at the end of the match to allow for a penalty kick to be taken or for one to be retaken, a goal shall be allowed if, before going into the goal, the ball touches any combination of the goalposts, crossbar, goalkeeper, or ground (providing no other infringement has been committed).

14. Player in offside position

- (a) It is not an offense in itself to be in an offside position.
- (b) A player shall be penalized for being offside if, at the moment the ball touches or is played by one of that player's teammates, the player is, in the opinion of the referee, involved in the active play by
 1. interfering with play or with an opponent, or
 2. gaining an advantage by being in that position.
- (c) A player shall not be penalized for offside by the referee
 1. merely because the player is in an offside position, or
 2. if the player receives the ball directly from a goal kick, a corner kick, or a throw-in.

An assistant referee must not signal merely because a player is in an offside position. Furthermore, if an assistant referee is in any doubt as to whether a player is offside (active position) or not, the referee should decide in favor of the attacker; in other words, refrain from signaling offside.

15. Goalkeeper restrictions

An indirect free kick is awarded to the opposing team if a goalkeeper, inside the goalkeeper's own penalty area,

- takes more than six seconds from the moment of establishing control with the hands until the ball is released into play
- touches the ball again with the hands after it has been released from the goalkeeper's possession and has not touched any other player outside the penalty area or has touched only a teammate inside the penalty area
- touches the ball with the hands after it has been deliberately kicked to the goalkeeper by a teammate
- touches the ball with the hands after receiving it directly from a throw-in taken by a teammate

16. Persistent infringements

Any player who repeatedly infringes the Laws of the Game by committing multiple fouls or by participating in a pattern of fouls directed at an opponent shall be cautioned and shown the yellow card.

17. Substitution

When a substitution is to take place, the substitute shall report to the fourth official (or assistant referee) and surrender the substitution card (if applicable), properly completed, at the halfway line. A player who is going to be replaced may not leave the field of play without the referee's permission and then only when the ball is out of play. The substitute may then enter the field at the halfway line after receiving a signal to do so from the referee.

The substitute must be fully ready to play before reporting to the appropriate official. Referees should not delay the timely restart of play to allow substitutes to correct their equipment or uniforms before entering the field nor shall the referee prevent a team from restarting play if the substitute has not reported to the appropriate official prior to play being stopped.

18. Injury of a player

If a player is bleeding, that player must leave the field immediately to have the bleeding stopped and the skin and uniform cleaned as thoroughly as possible. When the player is ready to return to the game, the player's injuries and the uniform must be inspected by an official. This can be the referee or, if delegated by the referee in the pregame conference, the fourth official or, if there is no fourth official, an assistant referee. Only then will the referee give permission for the player to re-enter the game; the game need not be stopped in this situation.

Only the referee may permit the return to the field of play of a player who was instructed to leave the field for treatment of an injury. This is not a substitution. The player who left the field for treatment of an injury may return during play with the permission of the referee, but only from the touch line. If the ball is out of play, the player may return with the permission of the referee across any boundary line.

Up to two team officials are permitted to enter the field of play with the referee's permission solely for the purpose of assessing an injury—not to treat it—and to arrange for the player's removal.

The referee must exercise care before allowing removal of a seriously injured player from the field.

In all cases, an injured player who has been removed from the field for treatment of injury during a stoppage may return to the field of play only with the permission of the referee and only after the match has restarted.

19. Attitude towards referees

Any player who protests at an official's decision may be cautioned. Any player who assaults or insults an official shall be sent off. The captain of a team, although responsible for the team's behavior, has no special rights.

20. Throw-in

A throw-in may not be taken from a distance of more than one yard (one meter) outside the touch line. Players who stand in front of the thrower in such a way as to harass the thrower or to interfere with the throw-in must be cautioned for unsporting behavior and shown the yellow card.

21. Wasting time

Any player who wastes time shall be cautioned for unsporting behavior. Wasting time occurs whenever a player:

- feigns injury;
- takes a free kick from a wrong position with the sole intention of forcing the referee to demand a retake;
- appears to prepare for a throw-in but suddenly leaves it to a teammate to perform the throw-in;
- performs any restart in such a way that the ball is not properly put into play, thus forcing a repetition of the restart;
- kicks the ball away or carries it away with the hands after the referee has stopped play for any reason;
- stands in front of the ball when a free kick has been awarded to the opposing team in order to give the team time to organize the defensive wall;
- excessively delays taking any restart;
- delays leaving the field when being substituted.

22. Celebration of goal

- (a) After a goal has been scored, the player who has scored it is allowed to share the joy with teammates. However, the referee must not allow them to spend an excessive amount of time in their opponents' half of the field. Neither shall the referee allow players to taunt their opponents. In any of these cases, the referee will caution the offending player for unsporting behavior. Referees must look beyond the behavior of players celebrating goals and consider as misconduct only those actions which are provocative, obscene or insulting, or which unnecessarily delay the restart of play.
- (b) If a player removes the shirt to celebrate a goal, the player must be cautioned for unsporting behavior and shown the yellow card.

23. Liquid refreshments during the match

Players shall be entitled to take liquid refreshments during a stoppage in the match but only on the touchline. Players may not leave the field during play to take liquids. It is forbidden to throw plastic water bags or any other water containers onto the field.

24. Players' equipment

- (a) The referee shall ensure that each player wears the uniform properly and check that anything worn by the player conforms with the requirements of Law 4. Players shall be made aware that their jersey remains tucked inside their shorts and that their socks remain pulled up. The referee shall also make sure that each player is wearing shinguards and that none of them is wearing potentially dangerous objects (such as watches or other jewelry of any nature).
- (b) Players are permitted to wear visible undergarments such as thermopants. They must, however, be the same color as the shorts of the team of the player wearing them and not extend beyond the top of the knee. If a team wears multicolored shorts, the undergarment must be the same color as the predominant color.
- (c) The referee, assisted as needed by the assistant referees, shall ensure that player equipment and uniforms comply with Law 4 and will pay particular attention to any items (e.g., braces) worn by a player which are not included in the standard uniform.

25. The Role of the Fourth Official

The Fourth Official will assist the referee at all times. The fourth official must indicate to the referee if the wrong player is cautioned or when a player who has been given a second caution is not sent off or when violent conduct occurs out of the view of the referee and assistant referees. The referee, however, retains the authority to decide on all points connected with play.

26. Trickery (cf. Law 12 IFAB Decision 3)

A player using a deliberate trick to circumvent the text and spirit of Law 12 regarding deliberate passes to the goalkeeper shall be cautioned for unsporting behavior and shown a yellow card.

27. Technical area

Team officials may convey tactical instructions to players during the game. However, team officials must remain within the confines of the technical area while doing so and must conduct themselves, at all times, in a responsible manner. Only one person at a time may be standing in the technical area, giving instructions to the team.

The technical area may be defined as an area covering the length of the substitutes' bench plus one yard on either side and extending from the front of the bench up to a distance of one yard (one meter) away from the touchline. It is recommended that markings be used to define this area, but the absence of such markings does not relieve team officials from the obligation to behave responsibly.

28. Reckless challenges

Referees should take stringent measures against players moving their arms and elbows without due care, by applying the sanctions available to them under Law 12.

29. Simulation (Law 12, IFAB Decision 5)

Any simulating action anywhere on the field, which is intended to deceive the referee, must be sanctioned as unsporting behavior.

A number of specific actions may be considered cautionable as unsporting behavior. These include faking an injury or exaggerating the seriousness of an injury and faking a foul (diving) or exaggerating the severity of a foul.